

LETTERS TO TRAVEL

Jerusalem story draws criticism

Travel editor:

The Seattle Times' generosity in providing free space April 19 to promote trips sponsored by an array of professional Israel-bashing organizations, disguised as citizen-diplomacy groups, is a sad reminder of the Seattle paper's bias.

Their sole purpose is not facilitating a better grasp of the complex Arab-Israeli conflict but rather the conversion of American to the new politically correct fashion of accusing Israel of exclusive responsibility for the tragic situation in the region.

A recent Middle East Witness (MEW) flyer, one of the organizations featured in your piece, writes that its goal is to "change U.S. foreign policy."

Moreover, the flyer is very explicit in how the delegations must be recruited. It stipulates that the MEW must give "priority to delegates who are willing and able to commit time and energy in reporting on their trip an organization for a change in U.S.

policy when they return."

In spite of Lauren Goldman Marshall's tribulations resulting from her exposure to Palestinian intolerance in the Christian Quarter, she remains — in her own words — a supporter of the Palestinian cause.

Her clarification notwithstanding, the incident described in great detail is far from being unique. I wonder why Ms. Goldman Marshall seems to be oblivious to the many manifestations of Palestinian rejection and hatred? I wonder why during her entire visit she could not find an opportunity to talk to one of the many victims of Palestinian terrorism?

Finally, I wonder when the Seattle Times will run, free of charge, a list of pro-Israeli organizations in the Pacific Northwest taking people to the Middle East on a fact-finding mission?

Balance used to be one of the guiding principles of the American Press. Imbalance turns respectable

newspapers into propaganda tools of marginal organizations engaged in a crusade against Israel.

The Hon. Harry-Kney-Tal
Consul General of Israel
Pacific Northwest Region
San Francisco

On history, politics

Lauren Goldman Marshall's piece on Jerusalem contained several factual inaccuracies and omissions which unfortunately only contribute to the perpetuation of hostilities between Palestinian Arabs and Israelis.

For instance, Marshall's allusions to the flowing nature of written Arabic as opposed to the block-like character of Hebrew on which she bases her conclusions about Arab and Israeli personality traits, is but one example of her lack of knowledge.

Hebrew, of course, has a flow just like Arabic in its written, cursive form. They are both Semitic languages which actually sound remarkably similar, but for the more guttural quality of Arabic. Perhaps Ms. Marshall would draw some sociological or architectural implications about that, too.

Ms. Marshall also rewrites her own version of Jerusalem's history. During the War of Independence in 1948, the Jordanians

captured the Jewish Quarter of the old city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was divided into Jewish and Jordanian sections, with Jews, Christians and Samaritans denied access to their holy sites. Former synagogues in the Old City were used as stables by the Jordanians, with reconstruction of some desecrated synagogues only recently completed.

Ms. Marshall expresses a peculiar discomfort with the upscale, clean and orderly rebuilding of the Jewish Quarter which has taken place since Jerusalem's reunification in 1967.

Perhaps Ms. Marshall would prefer that Israelis who wanted to live in close proximity to the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest site, preserve the squalid, teeming conditions which mark the other quarters of the Old City?

More disturbing than Marshall's inaccuracies, however, was the listing of organizations she suggested for travel to Israel. Each one listed has a specific political agenda concerning the Middle East. Just as is the case with every other country which promotes tourism, Israel has far more to offer than politics.

Thousands of Europeans flock to the beaches of Eilat every winter to enjoy some of the best snorkeling and scuba diving in the world;

legions of Christian pilgrims descend on Jerusalem and Bethlehem at Christmas and Easter; amateur and professional archaeologists participate in some of the most intriguing digs at sites all over Israel, etc., etc.

Listed below are some sources for information on the wide variety of experiences that await travelers who are looking to broaden their horizons in a fascinating region of the world.

■ Israel Government Tourist Office, 6380 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 1700, Los Angeles, CA 90048. Phone: 1-213-658-7462.

■ Volunteers for Israel, 2031 Third Ave., Seattle, WA 98021. Phone: 443-5400.

■ Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle, 2031 Third Ave., Seattle, WA 98121. Phone: 443-5400.

■ B'nai B'rith Tours, 450 Harmon Meadow Blvd., Secaucus, NJ 07096. Phone: 1-800-537-TOUR.

■ IntellectTours, Box 32123, Charleston, SC 29417. Phone: 1-803-556-0525.

■ Kibbutz Volunteers, 27 West 20th St., New York, NY 10011. Phone: 1-212-255-1338.

Judy Balint
Seattle

(Ms. Balint is director of communications for the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle.)

On appearances, symbols

It saddened me to read the lead article on the front page of the travel section on the morning that Western Christians observed Easter. Jews had just finished observing Passover and Eastern Christians observed Palm Sunday.

That a fellow American with a professional education and living in a multicultural city like Seattle could show such insensitivity when referring to one of the most important symbols to 5 percent of the world's population is disheartening at best.

Near the end of the article, Ms. Lauren Goldman Marshall writes that she "was outraged that someone should condemn (her) on appearances."

Strange, since she provoked the same emotion in me at the beginning of her article when she described "an elderly man in a long robe and a cylindrical hat." Surely, she and her friends must have realized that this was a cleric, even if they could not identify his religious affiliation.

I cannot presume to know what her friend was thinking when he said, "just ignore him," but the impression is given that this "elderly man" was somehow unworthy of their attention, dangerous or

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SOUTH AMERICA

Beyond the drug cartels on a visit to Colombia

by Cristina Rouvalls
Special to The Times

PAIPA, COLOMBIA — The road to this pueblo winds through countryside so lush and tranquil that it is hard to fathom the country's black stain of cocaine and guns.

The bus driver waves at verdant foothills, white-washed huts with Spanish-tile roofs and farmers walking with vegetables balanced on their heads. With a nationalist's pride, he boasts, "I've been all over South America. But this is the most beautiful."

I murmur that it is indeed stunning.

"Gringa?" he says, noticing my accent. "Tell me, what do they think of my country in the United States?"

Mustering up all my international diplomacy, I tell him that Colombia doesn't have the best reputation, that some of my friends think I'm a little daft for vacationing in a country known for a violent drug cartel.

"Ahhh," the gaunt man of about 45 says in disgust. "They have never been here. They don't know."

And then he inquires about plans for this summer.

bean coast.

News that scores of judges and journalists were killed by drug terrorists scared off the tourists two years ago. But foreigners are starting to come back now that the violence has diminished somewhat under a new president.

It's hard not to be intoxicated by Colombia's beauty and its striking contrasts — empty beaches, the jagged ranges of the Andes, unspoiled countryside, the urban grittiness of Bogota, the wildness of the Amazon.

And there's a certain charm to visiting a place that is not overrun by tourists. There are few gringo trails in Colombia and many wonderful finds off the beaten track, including the countryside surrounding Paipa.

I had the good fortune to spend the first part of my trek in the company of Colombians with a car near this dusty little town a few hours south of Bogota.

We anchored ourselves at Hotel Sochagota, which boasts the best medicinal waters in the country and a wonderful view of Lake Sochagota — all for \$50 a night.

For \$50 a night, the hotel is a



Seattle Times

nial town that was founded in 1572 and is almost completely intact. With its white-washed colonial buildings and flowering bushes, it is a popular honeymoon spot in Colombia.

Along with unspoiled beauty, there's also grinding poverty here.

The poor living conditions, combined with guerrillas on the loose, have lead many farmers to abandon this life and move to the cities.

Then there's Bogota. If New York City's too tame for you, try this metropolis of about 6 million.

Bogota is a mix of elegant society ladies walking next to beggars, a blend of culture and crime.

Here, more than anywhere, you can see the outcome of rapid urbanization: twenty years ago, two thirds of Colombia's population lived in the countryside. Now two-thirds live in

export cocaine to richer countries that trade in dollars.

Bogota is rich in theater and museums. And you can buy an excellent dinner here for \$5 to \$7, reflecting the fairly inexpensive prices in Colombia.

(The most expensive thing about Colombia is getting there, with round-trip flights from the United States running about \$1,000).

Other cities, such as Bucaramanga north of Bogota, have both less crime and less culture. But this modern city with warm, sunny weather also has traffic jams and crowded sidewalks.

Drive 10 minutes outside of Bucaramanga to take in the wonder of the Andes Mountains. A three-hour bus drive from Bucaramanga to San Gil lets you spiral up and down the ranges.

My trip ended on the Caribbean coast at Cartagena, probably the most photographed city in Colombia.

Cartagena is both a modern industrial city, a historic walled city and a seashore town. The Spaniards constructed elaborate walls to encircle the city after suffering five sieges by pirates in the 16th century, and the fortress remains.

For all its charm, you can't expect Disney-like efficiency in Colombia.

The national railroad is generally dysfunctional. The Avianca airline, Avianca, doesn't have Express train service, but the buses that transport

Deliver

\$199

From Round Trip

Nonstop Tuesday and Friday departures via Sun Country Airlines. Air and 3 nights' hotel from \$280. Variable vacation lengths. One-way for \$159. Car rental also available. Depart June 5 or 9 from \$59 one-way.

LAS VEGAS

From \$109 Round Trip

Depart June 4 from \$109 round trip; air and 3 nights' hotel from \$145. Depart June 7 & 11 from \$119; air and hotel packages from \$155. Sunday and Thursday departures from \$169 round trip. Nonstop flights via Sun Country Airlines. Select from 16 of Las Vegas most popular hotels located on the strip and downtown. Car rental or transfer option available. First day Alamo car rental free.* The following prices include \$169 round trip airfare, 3 or 4 nights' hotel and MLT's exclusive discount Fun Book.

Palace Station	from \$185	Excalibur	from \$229
Imperial Palace	from \$215	Golden Nugget	from \$235

Prices listed may only be available on certain departures, are subject to change, and are not retroactive. Price does not include a \$3 Passenger Facility charge beginning early June. Due to limited availability of seats, certain prices may not be available at time of booking. Air and hotel prices are per person based on double occupancy and vary with choice of hotel and departure date. Seats and rooms are subject to availability. Cancellation penalties may apply. MLT passengers will receive an Operator Participation Contract containing complete charter program information. A signed contract must accompany the first payment to MLT. *First day rental car is free with the purchase of two days or more.

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